These two quartets doubled the pleasure

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Is it possible to have too much of a good thing? When the schedule of musical events becomes crowded, that possibility certainly comes to mind. Yet, my answer is still a resolute "no," provided the quality is truly outstanding.

Two chamber events last weekend featuring string quartets provided good examples of this. Pro Musica featured the New World String Quartet Friday night at the Detroit Institute of Art. The Layfette String Quartet played last Sunday at Varner Hall, Oakland University.

The Layfette is quartet-in-residence at Oakland University and Center for Creative Studies — Institute of Music and Dance in Detroit.

Although these groups are on the opposite sides of the gender gap, the programs had a lot in common. Both had a work by a 20th century major composer, both programs included a quintet for strings with a fifth instrument and both attained a high degree of excellence in their performances. They also have the same return date — May 5. That's when the New World will be performing at the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills and the Layfette will return to Varner Hall. These are evening and afternoon events, respectively.

THE QUARTET NO. 3 BY BARTOK was the most difficult dish to swallow on the New World menu. This one movement work, divided into four shorter segments, features extreme dissonantic combinations with unorthodox sound effects in the first and third segments — the latter being a recapitulation of the first.

In between is a more traditional folk theme with typical Bartok native modalities. It is the kind of dish that one can appreciate only after it's fully digested — even if one doesn't enjoy every single bite.

This digestion was made somewhat easier by the most appealing appetizer — Schubert's Quartettsatz in C minor, D. 703, which is literally a single quartet movement that isn't part of a larger work.

The Italian Serende by Hugo Wolf was another one movement work, the only chamber work by him to enter the standard repertoire. Full body and bold intensity were the norm in this portion. This was combined with refined singing quality in the Schubert and Wolf selections, reflecting their exceptional skills as composers of lieder.

The main course was Mozart's Clarinet Quintet, with David Shifrin, clarinetist as guest. This work was performed just a few weeks ago by the Lyric Chamber Ensemble, with principal DSO clarinetist Theodore Olen, who was present last Friday. Some of the 19th century intensity tended to linger with the Mozart quintet, without straining it too seriously. This bolder approach underscored the strength and unshakable foundation of this masterpiece.

Avigdor Zaromp

Symphony names new vp-education

Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall has appointed Marsha Mabrey as vice president for educational affairs.

Commenting on her appointment, DSOH executive director Mark Volpe said, "It's not often that any organization can find someone of this caliber and diverse skills to fill so crucial a position.

Mabrey begins her duties on April 1. She will oversee the many programs offered by the Education Department, including various school programs, the DSO Fellowship Program, and the Unisys African-American Composers Forum, among others.

Born in Pittsburgh, Mabrey received her bachelor of music and master of music degrees from the University of Michigan School of Music. In instrumental music education, with minors in violin and viola.

She completed her doctoral studies in orchestral conducting at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

Mabrey now is assistant dean at the University of Oregon School of Music.

She also serves as radio host for the Beall Concert Hall Series and has been a faculty member and orchestra conductor at the University of Oregon, Grand Valley State University Department of Music and Winona State University Department of Music.

Active as a musician, Mabrey is principal conductor of the Emerald Chamber Orchestra, in Eugene, Ore., and has served as assistant conductor of the Grand Rapids Symphony.

She has appeared as guest conductor with the Oregon and Savannah symphony orchestras, the Sinfonietta Frankfurt, Germany, has served on the conducting faculty at the Interlochen National Music Camp, and has been guest conductor of All-State and honors orchestras at numerous State Music Educators conferences.

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